

Tom Braden

Do We Need Dirty Tricks? Post 5/17/75

In a hideaway office where his visitors can't be noted by the curious, Sen. Frank Church (D-Ida.) is hard at work investigating his country's intelligence services. It's not the mistakes of the past that most concern this normally lighthearted and friendly man. It's concern for the future.

"A wise preacher once told me to be careful how I selected an enemy. 'Once you begin to spend time thinking about your enemy,' he told me, 'you become like him.'"

This, Frank Church thinks, is what happened to the CIA. It became so obsessed with the power, the brilliance, the deeds and the deceptions of the Russian KGB that it became the mirror image of the KGB. If the KGB opposed a military regime, the CIA supported it; if the KGB set up a Communist front, the CIA set up its opposite; if the KGB supported a candidate, the CIA supported that candidate's opponent. Was the regime or the front or the candidate worth supporting? That didn't matter. Opposing the KGB was what mattered.

History suggests that there is a lot of sense to this analysis, and Frank Church is a sensible man. He is quite sure that his country needs a secret intelligence agency; he is fully aware of the fact that CIA gets the blame for much that CIA has never done or attempted to do; he knows that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger dis-

trusts him and his investigation, and he is determined that there will be no security breaches, which might give Kissinger just cause to complain.

He also knows that the Ford administration will try to make the Rockefeller commission's investigation the basis for what to do with CIA in the future. "The Congress," he says confidently, "will wait to hear from us."

Sitting in his hideaway office under the portrait of predecessor William E. Borah, Frank Church does not look like a man who could be very much interested in spies and bagmen, dirty tricks and assassination plots. "Boyish" is the adjective most frequently used to describe him. But Frank Church is old enough to have served in intelligence during wartime, and he has given much thought to the problems secret intelligence attempts to solve and to the problems the attempt creates.

Church's present view is that the CIA ought to discontinue covert operations; that is, the attempt to influence foreign governments by secret means. "Eventually," he muses, "the secret operation nearly always becomes public. It is nearly always embarrassing, and nearly always seems in retrospect to have been a mistake. But so long as the machinery to mount the operations exists, so long as a huge bureaucracy depends upon mounting them, so long as men owe

self-esteem and promotions to proving they can mount them, they will go on being mounted."

Church knows the counterargument: The Russians are doing it. Why shouldn't we?

"After nearly 30 years of buying that argument, we now own an organization which is feared all over the world, feared more perhaps even than the KGB. The Russians may not care about how the world regards them. But the United States does. The reputation of the CIA undermines the State Department, undermines the U.S. Information Agency, undermines the Peace Corps and makes the United States suspect wherever it wants to be trusted."

Frank Church seems to have made up his mind, and there's nothing wrong with that. The hard-liners on his committee, Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), for example, will have a chance to argue with him. But Church's view is something new in this city, which for a long time has gone along with the idea that covert operations were essential and that the only problem was how to control them. Listening to Church is to be reminded that the United States got along without peacetime covert operations until after World War II, and our reputation, prestige, influence and power did not, in retrospect, seem to have been diminished thereby.

© 1975, Los Angeles Times